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## New George Eliot Letters at The British Library

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## **William Baker and Donald Hawes** **NEW GEORGE ELIOT LETTERS AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY**

*The British Library Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts New Series 1981-1985* (2 vols., London: The British Library, 1994), records the acquisition of new George Eliot letters to its holdings.<sup>1</sup> Its Index lists under 'Cross née Evans... "George Eliot"' three items: 'Letter to J. T. Delane from George Eliot, 1859. 61891, f.88'; 'Letter to E. L. Stanley from George Eliot, 1869. 61891, f.90'; 'Letters to Florence Hill from George Eliot, [1869-?]-1873. 61891, ff.92-101' (p. 410).

The text of George Eliot's [30 November 1859] letter of protest to Delane, Editor of the London *Times*, about Newby, the publisher's 'issuing a work under the title of Adam Bede, Junior' and denial of the authorship of 'his so-called "sequel"' is found in the *Times*, 2 December 1859, p. 10d, and is reproduced in *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven and London, 1954-78), III, 220.

The other letters are unpublished and to recipients to whom letters do not appear in the *Letters*. The first is to Edward Lyulph Stanley, fourth Baron Sheffield, and fourth Baron Stanley of Alderley (1839-1925), who was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford, where he took a second class in classical moderations in 1859 and a first in literae humaniores in 1861. A Balliol Fellow from 1862 until 1869, he was called to the bar, and in 1872 became assistant Commissioner under the Friendly Societies Commission. In 1876 he became a member of the London School Board. L. A. Selby Bigge in his *DNB* entry on Lyulph Stanley observes that he 'took an active part' in controversy on 'the organization and administration of public education.' He 'was a strong advocate of public control...[who]...held that the development of a public system of education was the business of public authorities (preferably of *ad hoc* authorities).' He strongly resisted proposals 'to enlarge the influence...of voluntary or denominational bodies in that system' (*DNB* 1922-1930, London, 1961, pp. 805-806).

The 'Index' to *The George Eliot Letters* reveals that Stanley was on social terms with George Eliot and G. H. Lewes, and is listed amongst those who called at the Priory on 17 January and 13 June 1869, 16 November 1873 and 8 February 1874 (see *Letters*, V, 5, 45; IX, 111; VI, 14). He is included amongst the 'celebrated men and "nobs"' Lewes encountered at Lady Airlie's Garden Party at which he was introduced to Queen Sophie of the Netherlands. Lady Airlie was Stanley's sister (see *Letters*, VI, 154-5, and Lewes's Diary now at Yale University, 8 July 1875).

George Eliot's letter to Stanley coincides in dates with those she wrote to Emily Davies, 18 November, 7 December 1869, concerning the foundation of Girton College, Cambridge (see *Letters*, VIII, 468, 469). The letter is written in black ink on unheaded, black-edged stationery (she and Lewes were in mourning for Thorton Lewes, who had died on 19 October).

21 North Bank  
Dec. 28 69

Dear Mr Stanley

I am not one of the initiated, qualified to judge in detail of the schemes you recommend. But I have the heartiest adhesion to give to your fundamental position, that the University and College should be administered 'without partiality & without hypocrisy', that is, without an eye to religious creeds. And I admire the thoroughness and bravery with which you state your views. You had a great deal to propose in little space, & perhaps the pamphlet might have been more effective if you could have allowed yourself to give more 'connective tissue' of illustrative argument between the plans of new organization.

But happy is the writer in these days whom we reproach for being too brief!

Always yours truly  
M.E. Lewes

There are three unpublished letters to Florence Hill (1843 - 1935), the younger sister of Gertrude, Charles Lee Lewes's wife. The first letter includes the day, month and year in which it was written and refers to George Eliot's readings in Dante and familiarity with Dante commentary. She directs Florence to Bonaventura Lombardi's commentary, first published in Italian in 1791, and to Balbo Cesari's *Vita di Dante* (Firenze, 1853), a copy of which is amongst George Eliot's and George Henry Lewes's books now in their collection at Dr Williams's Library.<sup>2</sup> The letter is written in blue ink, on headed stationery.

The Priory  
21 North Bank  
Regents Park  
Jan.28.73

My dear Florence

Last year I was allowed to see a letter of yours from which I was delighted to gather that you have a reverential enjoyment of Dante. And on Saturday Octavia was telling us that you were anxious to have an edition of the *Divina Commedia* with a Commentary. All this has put it into our heads that we could give ourselves an indulgence, namely, to ask if you will accept from us this respectably worn copy of Lombardi's Commentary. Please to consider that the gift comes from the 'Divine poëta' himself, & and that we have packed it up & sent it for him. That is, in the deepest sense, simply true.

We shall soon be able to lend you Balbo's *Life*, which you want to read.

You are sure to find more or less stupidity in a commentator when he undertakes to

interpret the poet's thought, but he is an indispensable aid as to matters of historical allusion, & often to poetic idiom, is he not? Lombardi, I believe, is held to be as good as any.

Mr. Lewes is with me in all best wishes for you.

Yours ever truly affectionately  
M.E. Lewes

Another letter to Florence written October 26 [1873] belongs to the period of George Eliot's and George Henry Lewes's unsatisfactory stay at Blackbrook, Bickley, Kent from 5 September to the last day of October 1873.<sup>3</sup> The letter refers to the attempts to seek employment of emigré intellectuals, who had settled in England to escape the turmoil on the European continent, in this instance from Italy and France. There are frequent references in *The George Eliot Letters* to Mrs Strachey, who, with her husband, a former Lieutenant General in the Royal Engineers, 'were regular callers at the Priory' from 1872 onwards. According to J. W. Cross, George Eliot was 'very fond of'<sup>4</sup> Mrs Strachey, and one of the last letters George Eliot is known to have written, is to Mrs Strachey dated 19 December 1880, one of consolation on the death of her sister's husband, Sir James William Colville. Mrs Strachey had five sons and five daughters. George Eliot's letter is written on unheaded paper in purple ink.

Blackbrook  
Bickley  
Kent  
Oct.26

My dear Florence

Your account of Professor Farinelli excites our interest & we wish there were a better chance of anything efficient being done on his behalf in so short a time as 'by the end of this month.' Until precisely that term we shall stay here (i.e. until next Friday, the 31st), & the only thing we can think of as possible for us to do towards helping Signor Farinelli, supposing we had a longer time for trying, would be to mention him to such ladies of our acquaintance as are likely to want Italian lessons either for themselves or their children. Any success worth mentioning would be very precarious, because the teachers of modern languages are probably already too numerous for their own prosperity. A really able, learned man may be rare among them, but unhappily the need for thoroughness in a teacher is not often a conscious want in those who ask to be taught.

Still, if it were not for this necessity of immediate decision, the case would not be more hopeless than that of French gentlemen, who came here a little while ago as almost destitute refugees & have succeeded in supporting themselves by teaching.

We have thought of Mrs. Strachey, wife of General Edward Strachey, who has a large family, & cares much for thorough education, as one to whom we could mention Prof.

Farinelli, & others would occur in time.

We have been constantly desiring to hear better accounts of you from Gertrude than we have found her able to give. Do not say that your mind is 'utterly gone.' It is only kept prisoner—frozen up for a little while. We shall be among the friends who will most rejoice when the Spring has come to you again.

I wish we could do anything validly serviceable to your wishes, in this matter of Prof. Farinelli or any other.

Always affectionately yours  
M.E. Lewes

In a letter, to which no year can be assigned, George Eliot reveals her delight in a new piano and her concern for Florence 'who suffered from recurrent ill health.'<sup>5</sup> George Eliot writes on unheaded stationery in black ink on black-edged paper.

21 North Bank  
Nov.24

My dear Florence

I cannot wait for the hoped-for opportunity of seeing you, to tell you that I am delighted with the new piano, & feel the great service you have done me in trying it for me. The touch is what I desired & it seems to me altogether a delicious instrument. You can believe that I entered with fellow-feeling into the anxiety that must have been caused for you all by the illness of the valuable nurse. I trust that a good substitute has been found, but in any case the necessity for a change must have been trying.

Always your affectionately  
M.E. Lewes

#### Notes

1. We would like to thank Jonathan G. Ouvry, copyright holder on all unpublished George Eliot-George Henry Lewes letters for his permission to publish these letters, and the Trustees of the British Library, for permission to publish letters in their possession.
2. See William Baker, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library* (New York, 1977), p. 101, item 11. For George Eliot and Dante see Daniel Waley, *George Eliot's Blotter: A CommonPlace-Book* (London, 1980), pp. 18-19.
3. See G. S. Haight, *George Eliot. A Biography* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 466-67.

4. See *Letters*, VII, 264; IX, 320, 322. For Mrs Jane Maria Strachey, see *DNB*, 1901-1911, pp. 439-442.
5. Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill* (London, 1990), p. 83.